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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 RANGOON 001215

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ELAB](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: ILO WILL ANNOUNCE BURMA'S INTENTION TO WITHDRAW

REF: A. RANGOON 1174 AND PREVIOUS

[1](#)B. RANGOON 1094

[1](#)C. RANGOON 897 AND PREVIOUS

[1](#)D. RANGOON 246

[1](#)E. STATE 195514 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: A/DCM W. Patrick Murphy for Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The International Labor Organization (ILO) will issue on October 28 what its representative in Burma calls an "explosive" report that reveals the GOB's intention to withdraw from the organization, only the second time in recent decades that a member state has quit the ILO over labor-related criticism. The report--issued on the basis of a recent, un-publicized two-day visit to Burma by a senior ILO advisor aimed at resuming a dialogue on forced labor--will also make public a series of death threats directed at the ILO's Liaison Officer in Rangoon, note the GOB's failure to take action on those threats, and draw attention to the regime's anti-ILO propaganda campaign and overall unresponsiveness on forced labor issues. A senior GOB minister told the ILO envoy that the regime is no longer worried about ILO pressure, but rather is deeply concerned that the UN Security Council could decide to address Burma issues. End Summary.

AN "EXPLOSIVE" REPORT

[1](#)2. (C) On October 27, Richard Horsey, the ILO's Liaison Officer, a.i. in Burma, called on the acting Charge and Emboffs to inform, in confidence, that the ILO in Geneva will release a report that summarizes findings of an un-publicized Oct. 18-19 visit to Rangoon of the ILO Director General's Burma advisor Francis Maupain. According to Horsey, the report will be posted on Friday October 28 at 10:00 a.m. local time in Geneva.

[1](#)3. (C) Horsey said that Maupain had visited Rangoon at the invitation of the GOB. In recent weeks, there have been signs that the Burmese regime was stepping back from an intense anti-ILO campaign, undertaken in the wake of the June International Labor Conference (refs A-C). Minister of Labor U Thaung, who had shunned the ILO for months, met recently with Horsey on two occasions to discuss labor issues, and the regime's mass-member organization, the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), ceased its massive anti-ILO rallies. The ILO, said Horsey, went ahead with the Maupain visit as a low-key effort to resume a dialogue with the GOB, de facto in suspension since the failed mission of a high-profile senior ILO mission to Burma in February (ref D).

[1](#)4. (C) According to Horsey, the ILO report on Maupain's visit, which did not succeed in resuming a dialogue, will be "explosive" and will make public ILO information regarding:

- the GOB's apparent decision to withdraw from the ILO (as communicated in no uncertain terms to Maupain and Horsey by the Minister of Labor);
- the regime's anti-ILO campaign, undertaken since June, including mass rallies conducted by the USDA;
- a series of death threats directed at Horsey and the GOB's failure to investigate those threats or take protective measures (ref B); and,
- the GOB's overall unresponsiveness on forced labor issues.

A NOISY START TO A QUIET VISIT

[1](#)5. (C) Horsey recounted that he and Maupain met twice with the Labor Minister during Maupain's "very quiet" October 18-19 visit (the ILO reps and the Minister separately consulted with their respective hierarchies overnight, between the two meetings). Minister U Thaung shocked the ILO envoy at the outset of the initial meeting by informing him that senior SPDC authorities had already decided that Burma would withdraw from the ILO. U Thaung claimed that he had "gone out on a limb" with his superiors to delay official notification of the decision, pending Maupain's visit and any prospect that the ILO mission could offer other options. Horsey said that news of a withdrawal was a complete surprise since the visit was expected to lead to progress on a way forward for the GOB to work with the ILO.

[1](#)6. (C) Maupain told the Labor Minister that withdrawal from the ILO would be a negative step and send a very bad signal, not that the GOB was upset with the ILO, but rather that it

was not willing or able to eliminate forced labor. U Thaung responded that the GOB was no longer worried about ILO pressure, but rather was deeply concerned that the UN Security Council would decide to address Burma issues (ref E). The ILO reps countered that a GOB decision to withdraw from the ILO could, in fact, spur potential UNSC action, given that forced labor issues formed part of the basis for such action. "If you quit the ILO," Maupain advised the Minister, "you will embarrass the very countries that have supported you at the ILO and are trying to keep you off of the UNSC agenda." Maupain added that some countries had defended Burma because they had seen some positive steps on forced labor and wanted to encourage the GOB, but pulling the plug on the ILO would make such support more difficult.

CONVINCE US OTHERWISE

17. (C) Minister U Thaung said that all relevant GOB agencies had been consulted in making the withdrawal decision, but he asked if the ILO could offer anything to convince the senior SPDC leadership to do otherwise. Horsey said the ILO wanted the GOB to look beyond the November Governing Body meeting in Geneva and that a longer-term strategy was necessary to deal with individual complaints of forced labor and other labor issues. Horsey said the ILO offered that the joint Plan of Action on forced labor, developed in 2003 but tabled after the Depeyin attack against Aung San Suu Kyi and her convoy, would be the best way forward. Minister U Thaung, however, rejected the Plan of Action and declared that it was no longer a viable option (in what Horsey described as the GOB's first acknowledgment that it had no intention of resurrecting the Plan of Action).

18. (C) In the absence of a long-term strategy, Horsey said the only existing mechanism for cooperation on forced labor was his own ILO Liaison Office. There are serious shortcomings with this mechanism, he said. First, it is an ad hoc process, subject to allegations of bias and with no guarantees of confidentiality for individuals who report labor abuses. His role, Horsey said, should be to liaise with the parties on forced labor issues, not to resolve specific labor complaints. Second, the GOB has showed no support for the ILO Liaison Office, but rather issued diatribes against the ILO, condoned USDA anti-ILO rallies, and ignored multiple death threats against Horsey and his family. Therefore, the ILO reps told the Labor Minister, using the Liaison Office mechanism would require three conditions: a clear intent by the GOB to investigate the death threats; a public GOB statement of support for the ILO process to mitigate the anti-ILO rallies; and a full GOB commitment to a meaningful dialogue with the ILO on forced labor issues.

SEVERAL WAYS TO SKIN THE CAT

19. (C) Over the course of the two-day Maupain visit, said Horsey, the GOB would not agree to undertake any of the three conditions and the ILO concluded there was nothing further it could recommend to the Labor Minister to convince the "authorities" to reverse the withdrawal decision. Maupain again cautioned the Minister against leaving the ILO and advised that the GOB should avoid a "worse case scenario" that involved withdrawal notification, closing the Liaison Office, and eliminating dialogue during the mandatory two-year period before withdrawal officially takes effect.

110. (C) Maupain told the Labor Minister that the GOB could "minimize" the damage of a withdrawal by indicating in its notification letter an intent to continue a dialogue with the ILO. It would be better, Maupain added, to continue discussions during the two year period to try and find a way to resolve labor issues. Horsey noted that the GOB would still need to address the current constraints facing the Liaison Office, otherwise the "intent to cooperate" would not be credible and would be perceived as simply buying more time. Horsey told Emboffs that the ILO Director General views his mandate as seeking to engage the GOB in a dialogue and the ILO leadership doesn't support terminating Burma's membership. Horsey observed, however, that if the Governing Body (GB) viewed the ILO's efforts in Burma as obstructed, members of the GB would most likely take action and seek to pull the plug on the Liaison Office.

111. (C) Horsey acknowledged that Burma's withdrawal from the ILO is "hypothetical," given that the GOB has not yet submitted a formal letter of notification. He underscored, however, that the October 28 ILO report would be entirely factual, to include the Minister of Labor's unambiguous statements to Maupain, over the course of two days, that senior SPDC leaders had already made the decision to withdraw. Minister U Thaung, Horsey said, fully understood that the ILO would issue a report on the visit and that the report would reveal the GOB's intentions to withdraw from the ILO.

COMMENT: THE CONFIDENT MESSENGER

12. (C) Although the SPDC could react to the imminent ILO report in unpredictable (and illogical) ways, to include reneging on its notice to the ILO envoys, we note that Labor Minister U Thaung has the basis to speak on behalf of the GOB with some authority. A retired Colonel, and former Ambassador to the United States, he is the longest serving member of the GOB cabinet (since 1996) and is very close to SPDC Chairman Than Shwe. Horsey observed that U Thaung spoke with "extreme confidence" during the two sessions with the Maupain and gave every indication that he was reflecting senior SPDC thinking on the ILO issue. End Comment.
STOLTZ